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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [ENRG](#) [EPET](#) [BO](#) [UP](#)
SUBJECT: UKRAINE/BELARUS SUMMIT STILL PLANNED FOR MARCH

REF: A. MINSK 198

[1](#)B. KYIV 478
[1](#)C. 06 KYIV 4647

Classified By: Ambassador for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Plans are still proceeding for a Kyiv summit between President Yushchenko and Belarusian President Lukashenko, according to Deputy Foreign Minister Veselovsky during a meeting with EUR DAS Kramer, NSC Director Sterling, and the Ambassador. Kramer warned Veselovsky that such a meeting could support Lukashenko's efforts to legitimize himself without obtaining the concrete results that Ukraine sought. MFA Fourth Territorial Department Director Prokopchuk separately told visiting Embassy Minsk POL/ECON Chief that the meeting would take place by the end of March. In addition to bilateral agreements, both Prokopchuk and Yuliya Mostova, arguably the country's most influential journalist (and spouse of Defense Minister Hrytsenko), argued that Belarus, as another natural gas and oil transit country, could partner effectively with Ukraine to counter Russia's role as a natural gas and oil supplier. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Over a March 19 working lunch, Deputy Foreign Minister Andriy Veselovsky told EUR DAS David Kramer, NSC Director Adam Sterling, and Ambassador that President Yushchenko needed, for domestic political reasons, to go forward with plans to meet with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko. First stressing that the Ukrainian MFA was not originally responsible for the initiative, Veselovsky said that, now the plans had leaked, Yushchenko would appear feckless if he were to cancel. Yushchenko's representatives had seen the proposed meeting as a chance for Yushchenko to show he can secure concrete benefits for Ukraine. Among the agreements the meeting could produce was simplified transit arrangements for crossings between Slavutych and the Chornobyl nuclear power plant (Chornobyl agreement). Veselovsky acknowledged that the U.S. and EU would be irritated if a Yushchenko-Lukashenko meeting took place, but, he reasoned, their irritation would pass and Ukraine would continue to benefit from the new Ukraine-Belarus agreements. If the meeting did not take place, Yushchenko's critics in the government would argue that Yushchenko had been unable to do something as simple as holding a meeting with a neighboring head of state.

[1](#)3. (C) Kramer urged Veselovsky not to break ranks with U.S. and EU friends in the absence of any positive steps -- such as release of political prisoners -- from Lukashenko. Lukashenko's repressive practices had isolated Belarus and this isolation should continue until Lukashenko initiated democratic reforms. While he understood Ukraine's special circumstances arising from its shared border with Belarus, Kramer warned that Lukashenko was likely to exploit Yushchenko to legitimize himself without, in the end, providing the concessions that Ukraine was seeking.

14. (C) On March 20, MFA Fourth Territorial Department Director Ihor Prokopchuk told visiting Minsk POL/ECON Chief Dereck Hogan that the Yushchenko-Lukashenko meeting would definitely take place by the end of March and intimated that this meeting would be a private one between the two leaders only. Concluding the Chornobyl agreement would be the most important topic, but Yushchenko and Lukashenko would discuss six other agreements, including the signing of a Ukraine-Belarus consular agreement. Prokopchuk said Yushchenko would also push for release of political prisoners (especially Aleksandr Kozulin) and for Belarusan permission for the EU to open its mission in Minsk. He noted working level discussions on Belarusan ratification of the Ukraine-Belarus border demarcation treaty had gone nowhere, so the two leaders would need to discuss this topic and come to agreement on it for progress to be made.

15. (C) Prokopchuk told Hogan that recent events surrounding the Belarus-Russia energy relationship had highlighted the need for Belarus and countries in the region to diversify their energy supplies. No matter how loyal Belarus had been to the Russians on policy issues and how close the political and diplomatic relationship, Russia in the end still insisted on raising the price of energy to Belarus. This event could cause Lukashenko to be more serious about stabilizing relations with the West and other countries in the region in order to diversify energy supplies. Since the Belarus-Russia row, Belarusans had shown Ukraine increased interest on coordinating their energy arrangements. One proposal was for Central Asian oil to be delivered to Belarus through the Odesa-Brody pipeline. Prokopchuk concluded Ukraine wanted to engage Belarus bilaterally and observe positive reform in the country, but that it does not want to act as a "unilateral" mediator in the process. He also stated that Belarusans had no other alternative but to introduce reform on energy policy

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and other issues. Belarus would not make rapid decisions or changes, however, partly because the country still had ample energy reserves.

16. (U) In a possible indication that Ukrainian elite thinking might be changing regarding Belarus, respected analytical weekly Dzerkalo Tyzhnya editor-in-chief Yuliya Mostova urged the U.S. to liberalize its approach to Belarus. In a March 19 meeting with Kramer, Sterling, and Ambassador, Mostova said Lukashenko, now that he was Moscow's enemy number one, was serious about wanting to get an agreement of gas transit countries (Belarus, Ukraine, Lithuania, and Poland) that could work effectively against Russia's monopoly of natural gas supply. Such an agreement, once reached, Mostova argued, would be good for the region and function like a "missile defense shield" in the energy sphere.

17. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.gov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
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